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Welcome to Massachusetts!

Practical Information About Living in the State

updated 1/97

Published by William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth, Citizen Information Service · (617) 727-7030 or 1-800-392-6090 (within MA only)
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Massachusetts....

located in the heart of New England, is the region's most populous state. Lively urban areas, picturesque seaside communities, and tiny rural towns offer a unique ambiance which each year attracts many new residents. This pamphlet is designed to provide people contemplating a move to Massachusetts and those who have recently come here with specific information on the practical aspects of residency. I hope that new residents and those considering a move to the Bay State find this publication a good source of useful information.

William Francis Galvin
Secretary of the Commonwealth

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Residency

There is no formal procedure for establishing a legal residence in Massachusetts. Voter registration, automobile registration, a driver's license, the appearance of a person's name on a city or town street list, and rent, utility, mortgage or telephone bills normally provide tangible proof of residence. However, individual public or private agencies or institutions may have their own requirements for proof of residence.

Voter Registration

If you are a U.S. citizen, a Massachusetts resident, and you will be 18 years old on or before election day, you may register to vote at any city or town hall in person, or by mail, by contacting any city or town clerk's office. Social service, welfare, Registry of Motor Vehicle offices, and offices providing services for the disabled also have walk-in registration services available. Colleges, universities, high schools, and vocational schools will have registration availability for enrolled students. Registration in Massachusetts is permanent, but you must register again if you move or change your name.

Automobiles

Registration

Massachusetts residents are required to register their cars. You may do so at any branch office of the Registry of Motor Vehicles. Proof of ownership must be presented, in the form of the title to your car. If you come from a state which does not require titles, a bill of sale or a past registration will be accepted. Prior to registering your car, you will also need insurance certification issued by a licensed Massachusetts insurance company, indicating that your car is insured in accordance with Massachusetts laws. Registration costs $30 for two years. Note: Application for a Massachusetts title must be made at this time. The cost is $50.

Inspection

Within seven days after registering your car in Massachusetts, you must have it inspected at any gas station or automobile repair shop which has been certified by the Registry of Motor Vehicles as an official inspection station.

An inspection maintenance program requires both a yearly safety and emissions level inspection of motor vehicles. Motor vehicles that are more than 15

years old, that have a maximum speed of 25 m.p.h. or less, that have a diesel engine, that have a registered weight of 8,500 pounds or more, are motorcycles, or are new vehicles being registered for the first time are exempt from the emissions part of the inspection.

The fee for a combined safety and emissions inspection or a safety only inspection is $15.

Seat Belts

As of February 1, 1994, all passengers in vehicles must wear seat belts. Violators must pay a $25 fine if a driver is stopped for another motor vehicle infraction and an officer finds that any passenger is not wearing a seat belt. Under the combined safety and emissions inspection regulations, safety belts are required for motor vehicles where such safety belts were installed as original equipment. In addition, each passenger over 16 years of age not properly fastened in will be fined individually. Children five years of age or under may be protected with either an approved child passenger restraint or a properly fastened seat belt.

Sales Tax on Automobiles

If you move into Massachusetts within six months of purchasing a new or used car, you must pay either the full sales tax on the car or the difference between the Massachusetts sales tax and that of the state where the car was purchased. More specifically:

a. If Massachusetts has a reciprocity with the state and you have proof that the sales tax was paid in that state, you have only to pay the difference between the tax rates of the two states.
b. If Massachusetts does not have reciprocity with the state where the car was purchased, then you must pay the full Massachusetts sales tax. No sales tax has to be paid if the car was purchased out of state more than six months prior to your move.

Driver's License (Class D)

If you have a valid license to drive from any state in the U.S. or province of Canada, you are not required to take a driving test to obtain a Massachusetts license. You are, however, required to take a written examination. At a branch office of the Registry of Motor Vehicles, you may fill out an application form and make an appointment to take the written exam. If you pass the exam and an eye test, a photo license will be issued. The total cost is $68.75 and it is valid for five years. For more information, contact:

Registry of Motor Vehicles
100 Nashua Street*
Boston, MA 02114
(617) 351-4500
Toll-free: 1-800-858-3926

**until further notice*

Tax Structure

Ch. 121, Acts of 1990 increased the following taxes.

Personal Income Tax

A 5.95 percent tax on earned income from such sources as wages and salaries; unemployment compensation; alimony; Massachusetts bank interest; rents and royalty income; taxable pensions and annuity income IRA/Keogh distribution; profit or loss from a business or profession; and winnings and prizes. A 12 percent tax rate on unearned income such as dividends, interest (other than Massachusetts savings deposit interest), and capital gains

A declaration of estimated tax must be filed by those who expect to receive more than $500 of income subject to Massachusetts taxation which is not subject to Massachusetts withholding.

Sales and Use Tax

A 5 percent tax on the retail sale of all items unless exempted by statute. A 5 percent tax on tangible personal property which is used or stored in Massachusetts and upon which a sales tax has not been paid. Exemptions include food, clothing up to a value of $175, fuel for heating, newspapers, and prescription drugs. In addition, there is a sales tax on telecommunications services, utilities, and energy (including non-residential electricity, gas, steam, and heating fuel).

Sales Tax on Meals

A 5 percent tax on restaurant and take-out meals.

Gasoline Tax

A tax of 10 percent on the wholesale price per gallon (with a floor of 11 cents per gallon) plus an additional tax of 10 cents per gallon.

Cigarette Tax

The Health Protection Fund, voted into law in the 1992 state election, took effect January 1, 1993, to provide money for existing health programs and to create new smoking prevention projects. The fund is supported by a surtax of 25 cents per package of 20 cigarettes and a 25 percent tax on the wholesale price of smokeless tobacco. These taxes are added on top of the excise tax of 26 cents per package of 20 cigarettes and the sales tax of 5 percent on the total cost of cigarettes.

Alcoholic Beverages Tax

A tax on alcoholic beverages based on alcoholic content.

Automobile Excise Tax

An annual tax levied by the state but collected at the local level. The rate is $25 per thousand dollars of the car's value, as determined by the manufacturer's list price (without options) in the year of manufacture. The tax is figured according to the percentage of the list price. The percentages are as follows:

Year preceding the designated year of manufacture	50%
Year of designated manufacture	90%
Second year	60%
Third year	40%
Fourth year	25%
Fifth and subsequent years	10%

Estate Tax

As of 1996, the Massachusetts Estate Tax exemption is equal to that of the federal government. Estates of $600,000 or less are not subject to an estate tax, thus making the tax inapplicable to most estates. However, should an estate be over the exemption amount, the full value will be subject to the estate tax, not merely the difference between the estate's value and the $600,000 exemption. Nevertheless, estates passing on to surviving spouses are not subject to the tax, regardless of the value, but will be taxed upon the death of the surviving spouse. For more information, contact:

Estate Tax Unit
Department of Revenue
215 First Street, 4th floor
Cambridge, MA 02142
(617) 621-5900 or
(617) 887-MDOR (6367)

For more information on taxes in general, contact:

Department of Revenue
100 Cambridge Street
Boston, MA 02204
(617) 887-MDOR (6367)
Toll free within Massachusetts:
1-800-392-6089

Licenses and Permits

Marriage

The legal age to marry in Massachusetts is 18. All people who marry in the state must have a marriage license issued in Massachusetts by any city or town clerk.

Fishing/Hunting

State licenses are required for all persons, age 15 or over, to hunt or fish in any inland waters. Licenses are issued by a city or town clerk or the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. For more information, contact:

Division of Fisheries and Wildlife
Department of Fisheries,
Wildlife and Environmental Law Enforcement
100 Cambridge Street
Boston, MA 02202
(617) 727-3193

Boats and Recreational Vehicles

All boats with engines and other recreational vehicles such as snowmobiles and trail bikes must be registered with the Division of Law Enforcement. This

can be done either at one of the regional offices or in the Boston office. For more information, contact:

Massachusetts Environmental Police
Division of Law Enforcement
Department of Fisheries,
Wildlife and Environmental Law Enforcement
175 Portland Street
Boston, MA 02114-1713
(617) 727-3900

Drinking Age

The legal drinking age in Massachusetts is 21 (effective 6/1/85). Proper identification is a Massachusetts driver's license or a liquor purchase identification card issued by the Registry of Motor Vehicles.

Gun Laws

Gun and firearm permits are issued by local police departments. There are three basic types of permits: a firearm identification card (F.I.D.), a license to carry, and a license to purchase. An F.I.D. card is required to own, possess or carry (with some restrictions) a rifle, shotgun or ammunition including mace and to own or possess a pistol (handgun) which must be kept in the person's residence or place of business. A license to carry is required to transport or carry a handgun and may also be used to possess and carry a rifle or a shotgun. Permits to purchase are issued to F.I.D. holders to buy a handgun which, once purchased, is delivered by the local gun dealer to the home or place of business where the permit holder keeps it with the F.I.D. card. A permit to purchase conveys no right to transport or carry.

Non-residents traveling in Massachusetts with handguns are generally required to obtain a license to carry. However, non-residents traveling in the Commonwealth transporting an unloaded rifle or shotgun in a carrying case do not need a permit. Students cannot have any kind of gun in the buildings or on the grounds of any secondary school, college or university without the written permission of the board or officer in charge of the secondary school, college or university. People should not carry any guns loaded or unloaded away from their home or place of business unless they have the proper authorization or license. It is important to know that in Massachusetts there is a law which requires a one year mandatory jail sentence for illegally carrying a handgun, rifle or shotgun. For more information, contact your local police department or:

Department of Public Safety
Firearms Records Bureau
200 Arlington Street, Suite 2200
Chelsea, MA 02150
(617) 660-4780

Professions and Trades

Boards of Registration

Licenses are required for certain professions and trades in Massachusetts. State licenses are issued by the following Boards of Registration:

Allied Health Professions (Athletic Trainers, Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists), Allied Mental Health and Human Service Professionals (Marriage and Family Therapists, Rehabilitation Counselors, Mental Health Counselors), Architects, Barbers, Chiropractors, Cosmetologists, Dental Examiners, Dispensing Opticians, Drinking Water Supply Facility Operators, Electricians, Electrologists, Embalming and Funeral Directors, Engineers and Land Surveyors, Health Officers, Landscape Architects, Medicine, Nursing, Nursing Home Administrators, Optom etry, Pharmacy, Physician Assistants, Plumbers and Gasfitters, Podiatry, Psychology, Public Accountancy, Radio and Television Technicians, Real Estate Brokers and Salesmen, Respiratory Care Therapists, Sanitarians, Social Workers, Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology, and Veterinary Medicine.

For more information contact:

Boards of Registration
Division of Registration
100 Cambridge Street
Boston, MA 02202
(617) 727-3084

Teachers

Teachers and other professional education personnel must be certified by the Department of Education. For more information, contact:

Teacher Certification and Placement Bureau
Department of Education
350 Main Street
Malden, MA 02148
(617) 388-3300

Lawyers

If you have been practicing in another state for five years or more and have a Massachusetts lawyer to vouch for you, you can be sworn in by the Supreme Judicial Court. If you have been practicing for less than five years, you will have to take the bar examination administered by the Board of Bar Examiners. For more information, contact:

Board of Bar Examiners
77 Franklin Street
Boston, MA 02110
(617) 482-4467

Supreme Judicial Court
New Court House
Pemberton Square
Boston, MA 02108
(617) 725-8010

Other Occupations

In addition to these occupations, many other occupations are licensed by the state or at the local level. Check with Citizen Information Service for further information.

Transportation

Highways

Massachusetts has 31,300 miles of highways including the Massachusetts Turnpike (Interstate 90) which stretches the length of the state connecting Massachusetts with upper New York state and roads that lead to Connecticut. Interstate 95, which circles Boston, runs the width of the state from Rhode Island to New Hampshire. Interstate 93 connects Massachusetts with New Hampshire, and Interstate 91 connects western Massachusetts with Vermont and Connecticut.

For an official Massachusetts Transportation Map (limited supply) issued by the Massachusetts Highway Department, write:

Massachusetts Highway Department
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02116
(617) 973-7800

For a map of the Massachusetts Turnpike, contact:

Massachusetts Turnpike Authority
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02116
(617) 973-7300

Airports

Logan International Airport is the largest passenger and air cargo terminal in New England. It is located within the boundaries of Boston. For more information, contact:

Logan International Airport
Massachusetts Port Authority
East Boston, MA 02128
(617) 561-1800
Toll free: 1-800-23-LOGAN
or the individual airline.

For a listing of the 53 local airports, contact:

Massachusetts Aeronautics Commission
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02116
(617) 973-7350

Trains

Boston is part of Amtrak's eastern corridor. Direct service is available to New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. For information on nationwide Amtrak service, contact them toll free at 1-800-872-7245.

Buses

Massachusetts is serviced by bus companies which operate in large communities out of Greyhound/Trailways Bus Terminals and by local companies in smaller communities. Check your telephone book for your local office or terminal.

Public Transportation

The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority operates bus, trolley, trackless trolley, and rapid transit in 79 communities in the Greater Boston area. For an MBTA map and information, contact:

MBTA
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02116
(617) 222-5000

In addition, Amtrak under the aegis of the MBTA operates two commuter rail lines connecting Boston with various outlying suburbs. For information, contact Amtrak:

Boston area: (617) 722-3200
Toll-free: 1-800-392-6100

Throughout the rest of the state there are 14 regional transportation authorities which provide public transportation for specific regions. For more information contact:

Executive Office of Transportation and Construction
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02116
(617) 973-7000

Education

Public Schools

Primary and secondary schools are under the control of cities and towns. The state mandates school attendance for children between ages of 6 and 16 and requires school systems to operate kindergartens, but does not require children to attend them. According to state regulations a child who has turned six years of age must be enrolled in school (first grade) by the September following that birthday. For reports on public schools and school systems, contact:

Parent Information Center
Department of Education
One Ashburton Place, 14th floor
Boston, MA 02108
Toll-free: 1-800-297-0002

Private Schools

Information on private schools, such as accreditation, can be obtained from the following association:

New England Association of Schools and Colleges
209 Burlington Road
Bedford, MA 01730-1433
(617) 271-0022

Higher Education

There are 121 institutions of higher learning, public and private, located in Massachusetts. The state institutions include 15 two-year community colleges, seven four-year state colleges, and three state universities. In addition, the state college system contains two schools with specialized curricula: Massachusetts Maritime Academy and the Massachusetts College of Art. The state universities are spread across Massachusetts. The University of Massachusetts has a main campus in Amherst, a Boston campus, a Lowell campus, a Dartmouth campus, and a medical school in Worcester. To be eligible for the resident tuition rate, the applicant must be able to indicate residency (physical presence) and twelve months domicile in Massachusetts with intent to stay prior to the date of entry into the state college or university (six months for community colleges).

Housing & Job Opportunities

Massachusetts' 351 communities offer housing in a variety of geographical settings. Cost and availability vary according to location. Employment opportunities are found in a wide range of manufacturing and commercial enterprises in such diverse fields as computer science, technological research, textile, and tourist industries. One of the best places to get information on the jobs and housing available in Massachusetts is the classified section of a local newspaper. For the greater Boston area, the most complete classifieds are available in the Sunday editions of The Boston Globe or The Boston Herald.

The Boston Globe
135 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA 02125
(617) 929-2000

The Boston Herald
One Herald Square
Boston, MA 02106
(617) 426-3000

The Massachusetts Department of Employment and Training assists applicants in obtaining permanent jobs. It maintains job matching centers throughout the state for general employment placement. DET also runs state wide centers for job matching in specialized areas. You must apply in person. For more information, contact:

Employment & Training Division
19 Staniford Street
Boston, MA 02114
(617) 626-5300

Helpful Hints

Doctors

To locate a doctor in your area, contact:

Massachusetts Medical Society
1440 Main Street
Waltham, MA 02254
(617) 893-4610
Toll-free: 1-800-322-2303

You can also call local hospitals and ask for a list of physicians. To locate a specialist, call any teaching hospital (in Boston, Massachusetts General Hospital, Beth Israel Hospital, Brigham and Women's Hospital, and Tufts-New England Medical Center) and ask for the appropriate department. They will have references.

Dentists

To locate a dentist in your area, contact:

Massachusetts Dental Society
83 Speen Street
Natick, MA 01760
(508) 651-7511
Toll-free: 1-800-342-8747

Day Care

The Office for Children will provide lists of licensed day care facilities if you call or write:

Office for Children
One Ashburton Place, 11th floor
Boston, MA 02108
(617) 727-8900

Return of Bottles

Glass, plastic, metal, aluminum and bimetal containers holding beer and other malt beverages, carbonated soft drinks, and artificially carbonated mineral water are subject to mandatory deposit requirements. Wine, dairy products, natural fruit juices, and alcoholic beverages other than beer and malt are exempt.

The minimum refund value is five cents, and may be larger. Empty containers may be returned to redemption centers or retail outlets which sell or have sold within the past 60 days the same brand, type and size of container. For more information, contact:

Division of Solid Waste
Department of Environmental Protection
One Winter Street, 4th floor
Boston, MA 02108
(617) 292-5980

General Information

Official Name

Commonwealth of Massachusetts

State Capital

Boston

Population

6,016,425 (1990 U.S. Census Bureau)

Population Rank

13th of 50 states

Area

8,093 square miles (land and water)

Population Density

768 persons per square mile (land area)

Communities

312 towns; 39 cities

State Government

Six constitutional officers elected for four years: Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of the Commonwealth, Attorney General, Treasurer and Receiver General, Auditor

Legislature

Official Name: Great and General Court; Two branches with members elected for two years; House of Representatives: 160 members; Senate: 40 members